

# RÜINS AND VISIONS

*by the same author*

POEMS

VI NNA

T IAL OF A JUDG

T F STILL C NT

# RUINS AND VISIONS

poems by

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FABER & FABER LIMITED

24 Russell Square

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*First published in Mcmxlii  
by Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square, London, W C.1 .  
Second impression September Mcmxlii  
Third impression February Mcmxlvii  
Printed in Great Britain by  
Western Printing Services Ltd., Bristol  
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## PART ONE: A SEPARATION





## SONG

Stranger, you who hide my love  
In the curved cheek of a smile  
And sleep with her upon a tongue  
Of soft lies which beguile,  
Your paradisaal ecstasy  
Is justified is justified  
By hunger of all beasts beneath  
The overhanging cloud,  
Who, to snatch quick pleasures run,  
Before their momentary sun  
Be eclipsed by death.

Lightly, lightly from my sleep  
She stole, our vows of dew to break,  
Upon a day of melting rain  
Another love to take,  
Her happy happy perfidy  
Was justified was justified  
Since compulsive needs of sense  
Clamour to be satisfied  
And she was never one to miss  
The plausible happiness  
Of a new experience.

I, who stand beneath a bitter  
    Blasted tree, with the green life  
Of summer joy cut from my side  
    By that self-justifying knife,  
        I my exiled misery  
    Were justified were justified  
If upon two lives I preyed  
    Or punished with my suicide,  
        Or murdered pity in my heart  
        Or two other lives did part  
To     ke the world pay what I paid.

Oh, but supposing that I climb  
    Alo e to     high room of clouds  
Up     ladder of the time  
A d lie upo     bed alo e  
    And te r a fe ther from a wing  
And listen to the world below  
A d write round     y high paper walls  
    A ything a d everythi g  
Which I k ow a d do ot know!

## A SEPARATION

Yes. The will decided. But how can the heart  
decide,  
Lying deep under the surface  
Of the level reasons the eye sees—  
How can the heart decide  
To bask this loved face for ever?

The stony eyes on the fringe of darkness  
To forgo? The light within the body's blindness?  
To prove that these were lost in any case,  
And accept the stumbling stumps of consolations,

Where under sleep, under the day,  
Under the world, under the bones,  
The unturning changeless heart,  
Burnt gifts and swarms of passion,  
Makes its mad protestations  
And breaks, with vows and declarations?

## THE VASE OF TEARS

Tears pouring from this face of stone,  
Angels from the heart, unhappiness  
From some dream to yourself unknown—  
Let me dry your eyes with these kisses.  
I pour what comfort of ordinariness  
I can, faint light upon your night alone.  
And then we smother with caresses  
Both our starved needs to atone.

Stone face creased with human tears. yet  
Something in me gentle and delicate  
Sees through those eyes an ocean of green water  
And one by one the bitter drops collects  
Into my heart, a glass vase which reflects  
The world's grief weeping in its daughter.

## THE DOUBLE SHAME

You must live through the time when everything  
hurts

When the space of the ripe, loaded afternoon  
Expands to a landscape of white heat frozen  
And trees are weighed down with hearts of stone  
And green stares back where you stare alone,  
And the walking eyes throw flinty comments  
And the words which carry most knives are the  
blind

Phrases searching to be kind.

Solid and usual objects are ghosts  
The furniture carries cargoes of memory,  
The staircase has corners which remember  
As fire blows red in gusty embers,  
And each empty dress cuts out an image  
In fur and evening gown and summer and gold  
Of her who was different in each.

Pull down the blind and lie on the bed  
And clasp the hour in the glass of one room  
Against your mouth like a crystal doom.  
Take up the book and look at the letters

Hieroglyphs on sand and s eaningless—  
Here birds crossed once and cries were uttered  
In ist where sight and sound are blurred.

For the story of those who made mistakes  
Of one whose happiness pierced like a star  
Eludes d evades between sentences  
And the letters break 1 to eyes which read  
What the blood is now writing in your head,  
As though the char^cters sought for some clue  
To their being so perfectly living and dead  
In your story, worse than theirs, but true.

Set in the mind of their poet, they compare  
Their tragic bliss with your trivial despair  
And they have fingers which accuse  
You of the double way of sha e.  
At first you did not love enough  
And fterw rds you loved too much  
And you l cked the co fide ce to choose  
And you h ve only yourself to bla e.

## THE JOURNEY

· Upon what confident iron rails  
We seemed to move to the clear view  
At the end of the line, where, without fail,  
My visions would come true.

There, where the sun melts the curved hills  
In one transparent wave against the skies,  
I'd see your tender smile, more than your will,  
Shine through the coldness of your eyes.

Our harsh thoughts of to-day would run in tears  
Back to this buried Now become the past.  
In the cool shadows we'd unclasp our fears  
Transformed to love itself.

Oh, but the suddenly the line  
Swung onto another view  
Barren with myself, and the blank pair  
Of the created world without you.

## A HALL OF MIRRORS

Into a hall of mirrors  
A hall of many mirrors  
I enter,

Searching for that one face  
Of innocence amongst your many faces  
Endlessly repeated in the empty spaces  
Of your own eyes,  
Suspended thinly on threads  
Of your own self-admiring gaze.

At last, at last, when the light drops  
From the glass tongues of praise,  
In the dark your eyes are afraid,  
Cowering at the bottom of a sad and lonely pit,  
And your head like a doll's on your arm falls.

Yet a voice flowers from your sleep  
And Venus throbs through your shut eyelids.



I search through a tunnel of past years  
For a child who stands quite alone  
Fallen from the care of the world's hands,  
Exposed to all her fears,  
Her face bright as a fruit with wet tears,  
And I fall down shafts of love  
Into the abyss of something human  
Something lost when the long nights advance,  
Hidden behind the hands of chance.

I search deep in the wells of weakness  
And I read the innocence beyond the lie  
The truth behind the evasive eye,  
The terrible lost innocence  
Fluttering faintly in a distant dance,  
And the truth that stands, and begs forgiveness

Till I drown, drawn down by my own mercy.

So somewhere in the night, above the branches  
Restless with tongues of leaves over the square,  
Where you and I and all  
The false play-acting puppets are,  
In a high room, hidden in the darkness,  
There lies your heart, the truly good, &  
Swathed in the flesh where all roses unfold,  
War in the nest which is the root of beds,  
Surrounding me with love like all the stars

Blessing birth with seed of fires,  
O, waiting with an infinite gift  
Which to refuse to search and find  
Is to be cold and cruel and blind.

## NO ORPHEUS, NO EURYDICE

Nipples of bullets, precipices,  
Ropes, knives, all  
Now would seem as gentle  
As the far away kisses  
Of her these days remove  
—To the dervish of his mind  
Lost to her love.

There where his thoughts alone  
Dance round his walls,  
They paint his pale darling  
In a piteous attitude standing  
Amongst blowing winds of space,  
Dead, and waiting a sweet grace  
For him to follow, when she calls.

For how can he believe  
Her loss less than his?  
“True it is that she did leave  
Me for another’s kiss;  
Yet our lives did so entwine  
That the black space of my heart  
Torn from hers apart,  
Tore hers too from mine.”

O, but if he started  
Upon that long journey  
Of the newly departed  
Where one and all are born poor  
Into death naked,  
Like a slum Bank Holiday  
Of bathers on a desolate shore;

If, with nerves strung to a harp,  
He searched among the spirits there,  
Looking and singing for his wife  
To follow him back into life  
Out of this dull leaden place,  
He would never find there  
Her cold, starry, wondering face.

For he is no Orpheus,  
She no Eurydice.  
She has truly packed and gone  
To live with someone  
Else, in pleasures of the sun,  
Far from his kingdoms of despair  
Here, there, or anywhere.

## A WILD RACE

I know a wild race  
Foreign to their own time  
Estranged from their loved  
And hating home place

Inhabitants of dead languages,  
They still live in intact quarters  
Of cities and speeches.

From ashen parchment  
And corroded stone  
Their bearded thoughts  
Are still outspoken,

Out of dust and bone  
The broken unbroken

For their teeth stamped words  
Which still flash with eyes  
Where, whiter than paper,  
Their day dazzles libraries

And they were as far  
From their contemporaries  
As the living to-day  
From those are.

Far as the stars,  
Whose out-of-the-past light  
Ravishes to-night's light  
With their present-  
piercing future.

## II

Their unloved love  
Luminous with words  
Like a sun burned  
Through the transparent body  
Of their day's beauty  
For which they yearned.

Their endless need  
And their timeless gift  
Lay on the light eyelids  
Of their self-seeking  
Feminine city  
Like a reproach, weighed  
With immortality.

The beloved, afraid,  
Laughed, and had betrayed.

### III

But a girl to-day, dreaming  
On her wave of time  
With April clouds dwelling  
Through the mirror of her eyes,  
Lays down her book  
And smiles and sighs  
Lifting her empty head  
Across the gulf of centuries —

“O, if print put on flesh  
And these words were whispers  
From the lips of the poet  
In the vase of my face,  
Then this wave would be a river  
Where my name would float for ever  
And my flower never fade.

“O, I would understand  
What his own time and land  
Never knew that his heart  
Was torn apart  
By loss large as a vulture: hence  
The black fury of his dress  
And his hair in disorder.

“O, I would take his hand  
And his words would be my mirror  
Where I saw my face for ever.”

She thinks, turning from her lover  
Whose need then hung above her  
Like an eagle in the air.

And across the gulf of time  
The cold terrible snow mountains  
Saw his naked heart alone  
And they knew him  
And he knew them.



## PART TWO IRONIES OF WAR



## THE WAR GOD

Why cannot the one good  
Benevolent feasible  
Final dove descend?

And the wheat be divided?  
And the soldiers sent home?  
And the barriers torn down?  
And the enemies forgiven?  
And there be no retribution?

Because the conqueror  
Is a instrument of power,  
With merciless heart hampered  
Out of former fear,  
When to-day's vanquished  
Destroyed his noble father,  
Filling his cradle with anguish

His irredeemable victory  
Chokes back sobbing anxiety  
Lest children of the slain  
(When the ripe ears grow high

To the sickles of his own  
And the sun goes down)  
Rise in iron morning  
To stain with blood the sky  
And avenge their fathers again.

His heart broke before  
His raging splendour.  
The virgins of prayer  
Fumble vainly for that day  
Buried under ruins,  
Of his pride's greatest murder  
When his heart which was a child  
Asking and tender,  
He hunted and killed.

The lost filled with lead  
On the helpless field  
May dream the pious reason  
Of mercy, but also  
Their eyes know what they did  
In their own proud season,  
Their dead teeth bite the earth  
With semen of new hatred.

For the world is the world  
And not the slain  
Nor the slayer, forgive,  
Nor do wild shores

Of passionate histories  
Close on endless love,  
Though hidden under seas  
Of chafing despair,  
Love's need does not cease.

## TO POETS AND AIRMEN

(Dedic'ed to Mich'el Jones in his life, & d'ow i his  
me'ory)

Thinkers and airmen—all such  
Frie'ds and pilots upo' the edge  
Of the skies of the future—much  
You require a bullet's eye of courage  
To fly through this age.

The paper brows are winged and helmeted,  
The blind ankles bound to white road  
Streaming through a ight of lead  
Where cities explode.  
F' tes nlo d

H' tred bur' 1 g, in sm ll parcels,  
O' trage agai' st social lies,  
Hearts breaking ga'inst past refusals  
Of men to show small mercies  
To e . Now de' th repl'es  
Rele' sing ew, f' iliar devils.

A d yet, before you throw away your childhood,  
With the l' mbs p' sturi' gi' axen hair,  
T' plu' e i to this iron w' r,

Remember for a flash the wild good  
Drunkenness where  
You abandoned future care,

And then forget. Become what  
Things require The expletive word.  
The all-night-long screeching metal bird.  
A d all of time shut down in one shot  
Of night, by a gun uttered.

## THE AIR RAID ACROSS THE BAY

### I

Above the dead flat sea  
And watching rocks of black coast  
Across the bay, the high  
Searchlights probe the centre of the sky  
Their ends fusing in cones of light  
For a brilliant instant held up  
Then shattered like a cup.

They rub white rules through leaden dark,  
Projecting tall phantom  
Masts with swaying derricks  
Above the sea's broad level decks.

They slide triangles and parallels  
Of experimental theorems,  
Proving the hypothesis  
Of death, on wasted surfaces  
Of measureless blank distances.



## II

But through then, ghiding light-streams.

An invisible ragged sound

Moves, trailed by two distraught beams.

A thudding falls from remote cones

And pink sequins wink from a shot-silk screen.

Seeds of killing drop on cells of sleep

Which hug these promontories like dark-brown  
winkles.

Fingers pick away

Human minds from hollow skulls

## III

The shining ladders slant

Up to the god of war

Exalted on those golden stilts

And riding in his car

Of a destroying star

But the waves clucking in the rocks

And the sacred standing corn

Brittle, and swaying with metallic clicks,

Their secret wealth lock

In an elemental magic

Of ripeness, which mocks

The nails through flesh torn.

## WINTER AND SUMMER

Within my head, ches the perpetual winter  
Of this violent time, where pleasures fr  ze.  
My inner eye anticipates for ever  
Looking through naked trees and running wheels  
Onto a blank transparent sky  
Leaving nothing, as though, through iron aims,  
It was stared back at by the filmy surface  
Of lid covering its own despair.  
Thus, when the summer breaks upon my face  
With the outward shock of green wave  
Crested with leaves and creamy foam of flowers,  
I think the luxurious lazy meadows  
Are a deceiving canvas covering  
With a balmy paint of leafy billows,  
The furious volleys of chariotery's power  
Behind the sun, racing to destroy.  
When under light luns, heavy on their soil,  
I hear the groaning of the wretched lives  
Of those who revolve unreflecting wheels,  
Alas, I prove that I am right,  
For if my shadowed mind affirmed the light  
It would return to those green, foolish years  
When to live seemed to stand knee-deep in flowers:

There, winter was an indoor accident,  
Where, with head pressed against the glass, I  
    watched  
The garden, falsified by snow,  
Waiting to melt, and become real again .

## IN MEMORIAM

The senseless drone of the dull machines in the  
sky  
In a chain extending the boundaries  
Of a distant invisible will,  
Weaves a net of sound in the darkness on high  
Drawing the senses up in one Eye  
From our tunnelled entombed bodies,  
Where everything stops but the wishes that kill.

Living now becomes withered like flowers  
In the boring burned city which has no use  
For us but as lives and deaths to fill  
With fury the guns blazing back on the powers  
That scorch our small plot of blasted hours  
Death we cannot refuse  
Where everything stops but the wishes that kill.

Driven by intolerance and volted with lies,  
We melt down the whirring bodies of boys  
And their laughter distil  
To plough metal hatred through the skies  
And write with their burning eyes over cities

Sure no green summer joys,  
Where everything stops but the wishes that kill.

Filled with swear words, laughter and fire,  
Soothed by the girl hands and clothed in my  
words,

What, my fine feather-head, laughing lad  
Bill,

Was your life, but a curveting arc of desire  
Ricochetting in flames on your own funeral pyre  
Instinctive as birds,  
Where everything stops but the wishes that kill ?

## JUNE 1940

The early summer prepares its green feasts  
In the garden, hot on the blossom of the peach  
Pressed close by bird song, crossed by bees,  
Electrified with lizards; and the voices each to each

Speak afloat on deck chairs. They say  
How little they know of the battle far away  
Different from the war in France in their day.

Beyond the hot red walls, the blowing  
Of dust on dog roses in the hedges,  
The meadows weighed with shadows, bringing  
Youths with girls and bicycles, at evening  
Round the War Memorials of villages;

Beyond the crisp sea, with lilies  
Engraved by winds and keels on glass dunes,  
Perpetually moving and appearing still,  
Tiring the eye with permanent dance;  
Far away! Divided by gleaming scissors  
Of the steel channel—the raw edge of France.

Through their voices there moves a murmur like  
ball  
Rolled across the plains and hills,  
Divided to ruffled whispers by the seas.

For the German caterpillar-wheeled dreams,  
Imagined into steel, volley  
Through the spring songs and the green hedges,  
Crushing the lark's nest, with a roar of smoke,  
Through the weak barriers of France.

"False is this feast which the summer, all o'er garden,  
Spreads before the senses. Our minds must harden."

"Nor ears nor eyes, but the will  
Is the perceiving organ of the soul  
Man's world is not nature, but Hell  
Where he struggles to make a nightmare whole."

"History is a dragon under the soil  
Wearing to-day only as a skin  
Which men sloughs off when his dreams begin."

"The season of our soul is doom  
Born to-day from a terrible womb."

“Yes, we see the dragon’s teeth of the past  
From a hungry childhood grown  
Into avenging warriors at last.”

“Indolent injustice for so long  
Snoring over Germany, now is overthrown  
To face us with a still greater wrong.”

“While we forgot, and the sun seemed to forgive,  
Those bitter children were alive  
Their hatred never forgot to thrive ”

“Well, well, the greater wrong must meet  
To-morrow with a worse defeat.”

Afloat on the lawn, the ghastly last-war voices  
With blue eyes gaze for a moment on this  
England chained to the abyss.

Then, altogether, they begin  
To murmur: “Of course, we shall win.”

But the voice of one who was young and died  
In a great battle, the light leaves sighed.—

“I lay down with a greater doubt  
That it was all wrong from the start:  
Victory and defeat both the same,



Hollow masks worn by shame  
Over the questions of the heart.  
And there was many another name  
Dividing the sun's light like a prism  
With the rainbow colours of a "ism".  
I lay down dead like a world alone  
In a sky without faith or aim  
And nothing to believe in,  
Yet an endless empty need to atone."



## **PART THREE: DEATHS**



## THE AMBITIOUS SON

Old man, with hair made of newspaper cutting  
And the megaphone voice,  
Dhha in the public mind, strutting  
Like a canary before a clapping noise,

My childhood went for rides on your wishes  
As beggar's eye strides a tinsel horse,  
And how I reeled before your windy lashes  
Fit to drive a paper boat off its course!

Deep in my heart I learned this lesson  
As well have never been born at all  
As live through life and fail to impress on  
Time, our family n me, inch-t ll.

Father, how we both pitied those who had let  
The emptiness of their unknown name  
Gleam on a rose and fade on a secret,  
F r from our trumpeting posthumous fame!

For how shall we prove that we really exist  
Unless we hear, over and over,

Our ego through the world persist  
With all the guns of the self-lover?

Oh, when the weight of Time's whole darkness  
Presses upon our shuttered fall,  
How shall we prove, if our lives were but markless,  
That we have lived at all?

But, my admired one, imagine my sorrow  
When I watched the schoolboys' inquisitive faces  
Turn away from your Day, and Tomorrow  
Mock your forehead with sneering grimaces.

Soon you lay in your grave like a crumpled clow  
Eaten by worms, by quicklime forgotten,  
Fake, untragic, pelted down  
By a generation still more rotten.

When I left the funeral, my face was hard  
With my contempt for your failure still  
But, Father, my hardness was scabbed  
Sheathing your undefeated will.

Behold, a star fled from your breast  
Of death, into your life of light  
Making your long rest your unrest,  
My head buried with frustrated light.

Through my breast there broke the fire  
Of a prophetic son's anointment  
Seeking a fame greater than Empire.  
It was then I made my appointment

With Truth, beyond the doors of Death.  
How like an engine do I press  
Towards that terminus of my last breath,  
When all the Future you and I possess

Will open out onto those endless spaces  
Where, from an incorruptible mine,  
Yours and my name take their places  
Among the deathless names that shine!

O Father, to a grave of fame I faithfully follow!  
And yet I love the glance of failure tilted up  
With swimming eyes and waiting lips, to swallow  
The sunset from the sky as from a cup.

Often I stand, as though outside a wall,  
Outside a beggar's face, where a child seems hidden,  
And I remember being lost, when I was small,  
In a vast, deserted garden.

If I had the key I might return  
To where the lovers lie forgotten on bright grass.  
The prisoners and the homeless make me burn  
With homesickness when I pass.

Yes! I could drown in lives of weakness,  
For I pity and I understand  
The wishes and fulfillments under the dream surface  
Of an oblivious and uncharted land.



## TOD UND DAS MAEDCHEN

From a tree choked by ivy, rotted  
By liver-shaped fungus on the bark,  
Out of a topmost branch  
A single sprig is seen  
That shoots against the sky its mark,  
As though the dying trunk could launch  
The whole life of the sap  
Into one wedge-shaped steadfast glance  
Above the lapping shining circling evergreen.

So with you,  
Where you are lying,  
The strong tide of your limbs drawn back  
By green tides of regret,  
And the sorrowful golden flesh  
Scorched on by disease,  
How difficult is dying  
In your living dying eyes

Oh how, when you have died,  
Shall I remember to forget,  
And with knives to separate  
Your death from my life—

Since, darling, there is never a night  
But the restored prime of your youth  
Peaceful, does not float  
Upon my sleep, as on a boat,  
With the glance of love that lives  
I escape as truth.

## THE DROWNED

They still vibrate with the sound  
Of electric bells,  
The sailors who drown  
While their mouths and ships fill  
With wells of silence  
And horizons of distance.

Kate and Mary were the city  
Where they lingered on shore  
To mingle with the beauty  
Of the girls: they're still there—  
Where no numbness nor dumbness  
Appeals dance hall and bar.

No letters reach wrecks;  
Corpses have no telephone;  
Cold tides cut the nerves  
The desires are frozen  
While the blurred sky  
Rubs bitter medals on the eyes.

Jack sees her with another  
And he knows how she smiles

At the light facile rival  
Who so easily beguiles  
Dancing and doing  
What *he* néver will now

Cut off unfairly  
By the doom of doom<sup>t</sup>  
Which makes heroes and serious  
Skulls of men all,  
Where under waves we roll  
Whose one dream was to play  
And forget death all day.

## WINGS OF THE DOVE

Poor girl, inhabitant of a strange land  
Where death shines through your gaze,  
Although a terrible moonlight  
Stared through these light days  
With the skull-like gleam of night,

Poor child, you wear your summer dress  
And your scarf striped with gold  
As the earth wears a variegated cover  
Of coloured flowers  
Covering chaos and destruction over  
Where deaths are told

I look into your sunk eyes.  
Shafts of wells to both our hearts,  
Which cannot take part in the lies  
Of acting these gay parts.  
Under our lips, our minds  
Become one with the weeping  
Of the mortality  
Which through sleep is unsleeping.

Of what use is my weeping?  
It does not carry a surgeon's knife  
To cut the wrongly multiplying cells  
At the root of your life.  
It can only prove  
That extreme love  
Stretches beyond the flesh to hideous bone  
Howling in the dark alone

Oh, but my grief is thought, a dream,  
Which a clean gale will sweep away  
It does not wake every day  
To the facts which are and do not merely seem.  
The granite facts around your bed,  
Poverty-stricken hopeless ugliness  
Of the fact that you will soon be dead.

## THE FATES

### I

In the theatre,  
The actors act the ritual of their parts,  
Clowns, killers, lovers, captains,  
At the end falling on the sword  
Which opens out a window through their hearts  
And through the darkness to the gleaming eyes  
Of the watching masks slightly bored,

Of the audience  
Acting the part of their indifference,  
Pretending the thrusting pistons of the passions,  
Contorted masks of tears and mockery,  
Do not penetrate the surface fashions  
Covering their own naked skins

“We are not green fools nor black-eyed tragedians,  
Though perhaps, long ago, we were the killers.  
Still, still we have our moments of romance  
Under the moon, when we are the lovers  
But the rules of fate do not apply to us.

The howling consequences can be bribed away  
Discreetly, without fuss  
When we have left the play  
The furies of atonement will not follow after  
Our feet, into the street  
Where the traffic is controlled all day "

Sitting in stalls or pit, they pray  
That the externalized disaster  
Gesticulating puppets display  
Will not, with finger of catastrophe  
Revolve on them its hissing frontal limelight  
Not lift the curtains of their windows,  
Not rape their daughters in the coarse embrace  
Of the promiscuous newspapers  
Running with them in headlines through the streets  
In their lives, they have cut few capers  
So death, they hope, will be discreet,  
Raising a silk hat,  
Dressed in black, with a smile for each tear, polite

Oh which are the actors, which the audience?  
Those who sit back with a tear, a smile, a sigh,  
Where they deny deny deny?  
Or those on the stage who rip open their ribs  
Lift the lids from their skulls, tear the skin from  
    their arms,  
Revealing the secret corridors of dreams,  
The salt savour of the passions,



The crushed hyacinths of corruption,  
The opera-singing sexual organs.  
And within all, as in a high room,  
Filled with a vacuum containing infinite space,  
The soul playing at being a gull by a lake,  
Turning somersaults, immensely bored,  
Whistling to itself, writing memoirs of God,  
Forgetting  
What time and the undertakers undertake?

Oh which are the actors, which the audience?  
The actors, who simulate?  
Or those who are, who watch the actors  
Prove to them there is no fate?  
Where then is the real performance  
Which finally sweeps actors and audience  
Into a black box at the end of the play?

Both, both, vowing the real is the unreal,  
Are stared at by the silent stais  
Of the comprehensive universe  
Staging its play of passions in their hearts.  
It carries them off at the end in a hearse

## II

O brave, powdered mask of weeded motherhood  
For twenty years denying that the real  
Was ever anything but the exceptional,  
You were an excellent stage manager,

For your dear son's sake, of your theatre,  
Family life, not sombre, but light  
"This is the play where nothing happens that can  
    matter  
Except that we are sensible healthy and bright."

Your problem was no easy one,  
Somehow to spare your only son  
From the gloomy brooding blue of his father's eyes,  
After the War, for twenty years  
Pacing the lawn between two wars,  
His sombre way of staring at the table.  
You were courageous and capable  
Gaily you called these things his "moods".  
Just "moods", "moods", like anything else,  
A chair, the empty clanging of alarm bells.

You rebuilt the Georgian house with the old lawn,  
And the kitchen garden surrounded by a wall,  
And the servants in the servants' hall  
Tidying the rooms downstairs at dawn;  
And you bought a fishing rod, a pony and a gun  
And gave these serious playthings to your son

The fresh air and the scenery did the rest.  
He ripened and his laughter floated on the lake,  
A foretaste of the memories that now suggest  
His photograph with the shirt open at the neck.  
He came downstairs to dinner, "dressed".

Then your triumphant happiness bound cords  
Around his silken glance into one bow.  
Catching your husband's eye, your face spoke words  
"This is the world, we've left the past below."

If a guest came, and in the course  
Of conversation, spoke of "so-and-so's divorce",  
Or else, "Poor Lady X, she died of cancer",  
You had your fine frank answer,  
Questioning him with vivid curiosity,  
Poverty, adultery, disease, what strange mon-  
strosity!

You smiled, perhaps, at your guest's eccentricity  
Drugging such specimens out on your floor.

Your son grew up, and thought it all quite real.  
Hunting, the family, the business man's ideal.  
The poor and the unhappy had his sympathy.  
They were exceptions made to prove his rule.  
And yet he had his moments of uneasiness  
When in the dazzling garden of his family  
With the green sunlight tilted on your dress,  
His body suddenly seemed an indecency,  
A changeling struggled to the wrong address.

Still, he got married. *She* was dull, of course  
But everything had turned out quite all right.  
The bride sailed on the picture page in white  
Arm linked in his, face squinting in the light.

Your son wore uniform. You, the mother-in-law  
Who'd brought him up into a world at war,  
At last felt tired. You wondered what he knew of life,  
Whether enough to satisfy his wife. •  
Perhaps he'd learned from nature, or his horse.

### III

Oh, but in vain  
Do men bar themselves behind their doors  
Within the well-appointed house  
Painting, in designed acts, life as they would see it,  
By the fireside, in the garden, round the table.

The storm rises,  
The thunderbolt falls, and how feeble  
Is the long tradition strengthened with reverence  
Made sacred to respect by all appearance,  
Or the most up-to-date steel-and-concrete  
To withstand fate.

The walls fall, tearing down  
The fragile life of the interior.  
The cherishing fire in its grate  
Consumes the house, grown to a monster,  
As though the cat had turned into a tiger  
Leaping out of a world become a jungle  
To destroy its master.

The parents fall  
Clutching with weak hands beams snapped like  
    straw,  
And the handsome only son,  
Tanned leader of his village team,  
Is shaken out of the soft folds  
Of sill, spoiled life, as from a curtain.

He is thrown out onto a field abroad.  
A whip of lead  
Strikes a stain of blood from his pure forehead  
Into the dust he falls,  
The virginal face carved from a mother's kisses  
As though from sensitive ivory,  
Staring up at the sun, the eyes at last made open



## PART FOUR. VISIONS





## AT NIGHT

During day's foursquare light  
All is measured by eyes from the outside,  
Windows look and classify the clothes  
Walking upon their scaffolding of world.

But at night  
Structures are melted in a soft pond  
Of darkness, up to the stars.

Man's mind swims, full of lamps,  
Among foundations of the epoch.  
Clothes fade to the same curtains  
As night draws over the blaze of flesh.

His heart—surrounded by money,  
Loaded with a house, and hub-like  
Centring spokes of fashionable change—  
Grows drzzy at uncertainty,  
At life longer than single lives,  
At an opening out of spaces  
Revealing stars more numerous  
Than the overcrowded populace.

Every social attribute gained  
Falls into the Milky Way  
The questions so long hidden  
Behind the answers of the present  
Rise from the superstitious past  
Like ghosts from ruined palaces

Into his hand of a single moment  
There pour forgotten races  
With eyes opening on plains like flowers,

And the unknown nations to come after,  
Unthinkable as his own death dismissed  
To the vanishing point of the future,

All are crushed into the bones of Now  
Knit in his flesh of loneliness.

Oh, but his "I" might glide  
Here into another such "I"  
Invisible in nakedness,  
His heart in the heart of darkness find,  
Stretching from lonely birth to lonely  
Death, like a mind behind the mind,  
The image of his own loneliness,

The answering inconsolable cry  
Of lost humanity,  
Which the explicit day  
Colours and covers and explains away.

## THE BARN

Half-hidden by trees, the sheer roof of the barn  
Is warped to a river of tiles  
By currents of the sky's weather  
Through long damp years

Under the leaves, a great butterfly's wing  
Seems its brilliant red, streaked with dark lines  
Of lichen and rust, an underwing  
Of winter leaves.

A sapling, with a jet of flaming  
Foliage, cancels with its branches  
The guttered lower base of the roof, reflecting  
The tiles in a cup of green.

Under the crashing vault of sky,  
At the side of the road flashing past  
With rumour of smoke and steel,  
Hushed by whispers of leaves, and bird song,  
The barn from its dark throat  
Gurgitates with a gentle booming murmur.

This ghost of a noise suggests a gust  
Caught in its rafters aloft long ago,  
The turn of a winch, the wood of a wheel.

Tangled in the sound, as in a girl's hair  
Is the enthusiastic scent  
Of vivid yellow straw, lit by a sun-beam  
Laden with motes, on the boards of a floor.

## IN A GARDEN

**H**ad I pen ink and paper,  
I think that they could carry  
The weight of all these roses,  
These rocks and massive trees.

The hills weigh peacefully on my mind,  
The grottoed skull encloses  
Shifting lights and shade.  
Soft on the flesh all the green scene reposes

But that the singing of those birds  
Pressed to the hot wall of the sky,  
Tears through the listening writing of the eye  
To space beyond words.

## A CHILDHOOD

I am glad I met you on the edge  
Of your barbarous childhood.

In what purity of pleasure  
You danced alone like a peasant  
For the stamping joy's own sake!

How, set in their sandy sockets,  
Your clear truthful transparent eyes  
Shone out of the black frozen landscape  
Of those grey-clothed schoolboys!

How your shy hand offered  
The total generosity  
Of original unforewarned fearful trust,  
In a world grown old in iron hatred!

I m'gl'd to set down  
The first and ultimate you,  
Your inescapable soul. Although  
It fade like a fading smile  
Or light falling from faces  
Which some gummer preoccupation replaces.

This happens everywhere at every time.  
Joy lacks the cause of joy,  
Love the answering love,  
And truth the objectless persistent loneliness,  
As they grow older,  
To become later what they were  
In childhood earlier—  
In a grown-up world of cheating compromises.

Childhood, its own flower,  
Flushes from the grasses with no reason  
Except the sky of that season  
But the grown desires need objects  
And taste of these corrupts the tongue  
And the natural need is scattered  
Amongst satisfactions which satisfy  
A debased need

Yet all prayers are on the side of  
Giving strength to innocence,  
So I pray for nothing new,  
I pray only, after such knowledge,  
That you may have the strength to become you.

And I shall remember  
You, who, being younger,  
Will probably forget.



## INTO LIFE

Aiming from clocks and space,  
O Man of Flesh, I hew  
Your features, blow on blow.  
I cut away each surface  
To lay bare what I know—  
Universe within you

Shut close in your mind,  
You never quite will learn  
To see your life as whole  
Your mirrors are too blind,  
They have no eyes that turn  
From each age on your soul.

Your sense flies to each facet  
Striking from each hour,  
Now all heat, now all brain,  
All sex, sickness, power,  
That severe line, when I place it,  
Seems nothing but pain.

Yet all experience, like stars  
    (In distances of night,  
        Their brilliant separate incidents  
Divided by light-years)  
    Hangs in your eyes the lights  
        Of sustained co-existence.

What you were, you are,  
    And what you will be, you are, too.  
    Born, you're dead, loving, are sad.  
The years add, star by star,  
    The whole of life consuming you  
        In fires of good and bad.

## THE COAST

These riding and ridden faces  
Upon the wheels and tracks of trade,  
With ruts where money runs; their talk  
A metal traffic, bodies jolting trucks, their glances  
Squinting six months ahead to count the profit,  
Not a day beyond;  
These in the streets, the dives, the shops, the City,

Inhabit this coast of rocks,  
Poriferous stone expectorated on  
By jellied spittle; rockpools lisping—  
*Blog, blah, fligger, fluck, fick. mallock.*

Where the tide furls back shallow finny waves,  
My swearing mates in their blue dungarees  
Stand on the endless mud-flats reaching back  
To their unscrupulous births. The sea  
Will swill away the tag-ends of their names  
With cards, and all the harbours do forget.

Would not, to open any door  
Onto the star socketed in a skull,

Or through the domed night to the balanced scales,  
Or following threads leading to faith  
Sustained between two pairs of eyes  
Be false and frail as flowers  
Crushed by iron machines of power?

Yet there are eyes which float upon the wreckage  
Secretly clinging to a gleaming straw.  
Some acts of kindness wave their handkerchiefs.  
A trickling life runs through clogged veins  
And streams flow backward buried under flesh.

A wind blows hither

Rest, rest, you ghoulish masks of life,  
At last the fingers of the sky  
Will lift the hard expressions from your tongues,  
Unlock the mild sighs from your skulls,  
Laugh with the laughter clinging to the marrow,  
And knit you, flesh and bone,  
Into a life of joy again

## DUSK

Steel edge of plough  
Thrusts through the stiff  
Ruffled fields of turfy  
Cloud in the sky.  
Above charcoal hedges  
And dead leaf of land  
It cuts out a deep  
Gleaming furrow  
Of clear glass looking  
Through our funnelled day  
Up a stair of stars.

On earth below  
The knotted hands  
Lay down then tasks,  
And the wooden handles  
Of steel implements  
Gently touch the ground.  
The shifting animals  
Wrinkle their muzzles  
At the sweet passing peace,

Like bells, of the breeze;  
And the will of Man  
Floats loose, released.

The dropping day  
Encloses the universe  
In a wider mantel  
Than meridian blaze.  
A terra cotta blanket  
Of dark, robs one by one  
Recognition from villages,  
Features from flowers,  
News from men,  
Stones from the sun

All the names fade away.  
With a spasm, nakedness  
Assumes mankind  
Their minds, cast adrift  
On beds in upper rooms,  
Awaiting the anchorage  
Of sleep, see more  
Than a landscape of words.

The great lost river  
Crepitates  
Through creeks of their brains  
Long-buried days  
Rise in their dreams.

Their tight fists unclose  
The powers they hold,  
The manners and gold.

Then the burning eye  
Of a timeless Being  
Stares through their limbs  
Drawing up through their bones  
Mists of the past  
Filled with chatter and gapes,  
Bronze and stone gifts,  
From all continents  
Of the tree of Man.

The sun of this night  
Mocks their dark day  
Filled with brief aims  
—Stealing from their kind  
And killing their kind.  
Abandoning hope,  
They turn with a groan  
From that terror of love  
Back to their daybreak of  
Habitual hatred.

## DAYBREAK

At dawn she lay with her profile at that angle  
Which, sleeping, seems the stone face of an angel;  
Her hair a harp the hand of a breeze follows .  
To play, against the white cloud of the pillows.  
Then in a flush of rose she woke, and her eyes were  
open

Swimming with blue through the rose flesh of dawn.  
From her dew of lips, the drop of one word  
Fell, from a dawn of fountains, when she murmured  
“Darling”,—upon my heart the song of the first bird.  
“My dream glides in my dream,” she said, “come  
true.

I waken from you to my dream of you.”  
O, then my waking dream dared to assume  
The audacity of her sleep. Our dreams  
Flowed into each other’s arms, like streams.



## TO NATASHA

You, whom such fragments do surround  
Of childhood straying through your face  
Leaving two signs of hair there as your name—  
Through the loneliness  
Of my long look past the darkness  
At the tunnel's end, I watch your curving neck,  
The wondering colours marvel in your eyes,  
My space of silence touch your dawn that lights  
My life's emerging line.

You, who are afraid of fear,  
Whose past has moulded hollows in your cheeks,  
Who murmur "mercy", turning in your sleep,  
Whose glances touch me with shy voices:  
Your fingers of music  
Press down rebellion of mistakes  
Raise here our devout tower of mutual prayer.

I one who knows each day his past  
Tear out the links from an achieving chain,  
Dily through vigorous imagining

